Retro #38: Weather Station and Tower at St. Stanislaus, 1897–1979

For ninety years, the Brothers of the Sacred Heart at St. Stanislaus College quietly operated one of the most important weather observation sites on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. From 1889 until the station's relocation to Stennis in 1979, assigned Brothers served as official U.S. Weather Bureau observers, meticulously recording and reporting local conditions to both the Bureau and *The Sea Coast Echo*. Their work produced some of the most significant meteorological data ever captured in Bay St. Louis.

A Tradition of Precision

The Brothers' daily observations documented everything from routine rainfall to historic extremes. In 1901, Br. Matthew Burns reported a December temperature of 18 degrees—the lowest ever recorded since the college assumed responsibility for the station. Decades later, Br. Roderick Hagett informed the *Echo* that 6.5 inches of rain had fallen in just twelve hours on a June day in 1961. In April 1964, Br. Joel Johnson measured an astonishing 11.21 inches of rain in a single day, accompanied by winds reaching 72 miles per hour.

Brother Clifford, official representative of the Weather Bureau, checks the amount of rainfall after a slight squall. The White Cap 1958

Most residents never noticed the modest rain gauge tucked behind campus buildings, nor the sophisticated instruments housed inside the sacristy of the chapel building. Yet during Hurricane Camille in 1969, that equipment captured one of the most remarkable hurricane measurements in U.S. history: a minimum pressure of 26.85 inches (909 mb) before the instruments failed—one of the lowest sea-level pressures ever recorded at landfall in the United States. Br. Leon Stock also documented 10.9 inches of rainfall during Camille.

The Weather Tower: A Landmark on the Beachfront

The most visible symbol of the college's meteorological role was the 75-foot metal weather tower standing near the beach road. After the Weather Bureau adopted the marine Small Craft Warning in 1911, *The Sea Coast Echo* announced that the new red pennant signal would be displayed at St. Stanislaus as conditions required. In 1917, the government erected the college's new tower, equipped with electric lights that replaced the older oil-burning system.

The tower quickly became a campus icon. Sea captains appreciated its warnings, and students loved gathering around it for photographs. The school archives preserve images of the 1944–45 football offensive line posing on and around the structure, as well as a 1965 photo of a Brother and students raising hurricane flags before Hurricane Betsy. One of the large 14-foot hurricane warning flags—red with a black square—was later donated to the archives by Br. Ramon Daunis.

The tower served faithfully for more than fifty years before being removed after Hurricane Camille in 1969.

Brother Robert Duplantis and three students raise the hurricane warning flags as Hurricane Betsey approached in September 1965.

This flag was in Brother Ramon's possession.
The flag was used to represent a hurricane warning.
We do not know when this was crafted, however we believe it was some time before Hurricane Camille.

A Legacy of Safety and Service

Throughout its long history, the weather station at St. Stanislaus played a vital role in protecting both the Bay St. Louis community and the college itself. The Brothers' vigilance ensured timely warnings during dangerous storms, and it is noteworthy that no student or faculty member ever suffered serious injury during any of the severe storms that damaged campus buildings over the decades.

From hidden instruments in the chapel's sacristy to the towering signal mast on the beachfront, St. Stanislaus quietly shaped local weather history. Its contributions—scientific, practical, and communal—remain an enduring part of the story of Bay St. Louis.